



## CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374

Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

---

Volume 22 | (2020) Issue 4


Article 7

---

### Deconstructing Feminine and Feminist Fantastic through the Study of Living Dolls

Raquel Velázquez  
*University of Barcelona*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Spanish Literature Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Velázquez, Raquel. "Deconstructing Feminine and Feminist Fantastic through the Study of Living Dolls." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 22.4 (2020): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3720>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3720)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 0 times as of 03/14/21.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

**CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture**

ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>  
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 22 Issue 4 (December 2020) Article 7**

**Raquel Velázquez,**

**"Deconstructing Feminine and Feminist Fantastic through the Study of Living Dolls"**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss4/7>>

---

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.4 (2020)**

Special Issue ***New Perspectives on the Female Fantastic***. Ed. David Roas and Patricia García

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss4/>>

---

**Abstract:** In her "Deconstructing Feminine and Feminine Fantastic through the Study of Living Dolls," Raquel Velázquez analyzes the treatment of one idiosyncratic image within the fantastic genre, and one that also has a special impact on the configuration of the feminine: the doll. On the one hand, she examines the evolution of this fantastic motif in order to determine whether it involves a transformation of how the feminine fantastic is represented. On the other hand, she establishes some correlations between the image of the fantastic doll, and the development of processes such as the dollification of women or the humanization of the doll as it is identified in contemporary society. This is seen as an exemplification of how both the alleged *feminine fantastic* (which is questioned here), and the feminist fantastic adjust, alter, or adapt, in the same way as the society in which it is contextualized or integrated.

## **Raquel VELÁZQUEZ**

### **Deconstructing Feminine and Feminist Fantastic through the Study of Living Dolls**

There is an entire series of obvious or easily identifiable mechanisms<sup>1</sup> through which the voice of female writers is silenced, disregarded, and censored. These silencing procedures, such as the reduced possibilities for creative women within the publishing market, or their very scarce presence within the literary canon, involve a clear limitation of writing spaces, which not only hinders their literary careers, but it also directly influences how women are told.

Thus, for women writers, the processes of visibilization and control over their own voice fulfill such a relevant function, insofar as they make it possible to write their own stories; stories that have hitherto been written by others - namely men. Indeed, constructing a whole series of stereotyped images of the feminine is also a very solid - perhaps less obvious - way of suppressing women. For this reason, works (both critical and creative) centered on images of women have been so decisive in the history of feminism. On the one hand, we have the classic volumes by Mary Ellman (1968), and Susan Koppelman (1972), two of the many examples, focused on the analysis of the stereotyped images that could be traced in male writers' production. On the other hand, we have witnessed the rise of anthologies, organized according to gender criteria, with which women writers equip themselves in order to take control of those images. In the field of the unusual, titles such as Pamela Sargent's well-known science fiction anthology *Women of Wonder: Science Fiction Stories by Women about Women* (1975) emerged in such a way that they reverted and subverted the images of tradition while offering new and more proper representations of the feminine.

Therefore, when one addresses the question of whether or not there is a so-called feminine fantastic<sup>2</sup> (parallel to the debate on the existence, or not, of female writing as opposed to male writing) and if so, one proposes elucidating what its particularities are, then thematic studies are still relevant. However, the analysis of images or themes that are considered "feminine," the axis around which many of the theoretical studies in the field are structured, do not seem to lead us to defend the existence of a feminine fantastic. Although we can intuit a tendency on the part of female creators to deal with subjects that had been overlooked by male writers, several earlier studies on Spanish fantastic microfiction (Velázquez "Quarens") revealed the impossibility of defending (at least for this genre) a clear gender distinction with regard to the choice of the subjects of the fantastic. Topics that have been traditionally defended as "feminine," such as motherhood, or mother-daughter relationships, or even rape, linked to the fantastic are cultivated by both male and female writers. Something similar happens with rewriting, frequently used to subvert mythical and mythological constructions of the feminine. Its recurrence does not seem to correspond either, however, with the gender of the person who cultivates the fantastic.

Furthermore, not even the deconstruction of stereotyped images of the feminine on the part of female creators would determine their relationship with a feminine fantastic, but rather one with a feminist fantastic. On the other hand, the feminist fantastic cannot be identified with the female gender (at least, not always), since there are also male creators - still a minority - who cultivate the fantastic from a feminist vindication viewpoint, whether consciously or not. This is what seemed to determine the study of the resurgence of the mantis woman or devouring woman in the twenty-first century Spanish fantastic micronarrative, which led to an article published in 2019 (Velázquez "Quarens"). It started from the hypothesis that the female writer would develop a distinctive way of approaching this mythical figure of the monstrous. However, the study of the minification corpus of both male and female authors revealed that the mantis woman was present in texts written by both men and women and that, moreover, there were coinciding attributes in her representations. It was therefore not an image constructed by women from the feminine perspective, but rather an image, rooted in tradition, which occupied a prominent place in postmodern minification, regardless of the gender of the author. In other words, the possible feminist reading that could be derived from the renewal of this monstrous being of the devouring woman (which counteracted the devoured woman) was not necessarily linked to the woman writer alone, but to, let us say, an *agendered* consciousness.

Yet the study of the images with which the fantastic is constructed remains one of the most effective ways of dealing with issues such as the feminine fantastic employed by some scholars - a syntagma that should be banished - or the feminist fantastic - its most appropriate substitute (within the female fantastic). Indeed, the existence and cultivation of a feminist fantastic (which entails the

---

<sup>1</sup> Creative and activist women such as Tillie Olsen, in *Silences* (1978), or Joanna Russ, in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983) were involved in highlighting these mechanisms early on.

<sup>2</sup> In other words, whether there is a specific, particular, or essentialist way of how female writers approach the fantastic (dealing with themes associated stereotypically with women, for example).

reality of a "*machista* fantastic," or a fantastic that silences the feminine) contributes to subverting and reverting<sup>3</sup> the images through which women are objectified, minimized, or infantilized. It helps to create spaces for critical reflection and establishes links with society by echoing extratextual problems. To a large extent, this explains the interest in *rewriting* among Spanish minifiction writers, as it brings with it the possibility of subversion, an opportunity to have an alternative narrative of the story. In the fantastic sphere, rewriting is mainly associated with the attraction to certain mythological creatures that connect with the monstrous, but also with power and force, such as Circe, the mermaids or Medusa, who in general terms demand a greater prominence and a voice of their own. Conversely, Penelope and Ariadne are detached from their attributes of *donna angelicata*, although sometimes that means turning them into *donne diavole*. An example of clear subversion is offered by Araceli Esteves in the short story "Año cero" ("Year Zero", 2013), where she rewrites the story of Mary for the twenty-first century. Mary has an abortion so that Joseph will not know about the child he is expecting.

The present work starts from the assumption that the so-called feminine fantastic is not limited exclusively to the fantastic written by women (the syntagma female fantastic is clearly a more suitable one for this concept), but to the fictional universe of women within the field of fantastic literature (represented by both men and women). The aim of the study is to analyze the treatment of one of the most idiosyncratic images of the genre, one which also has a special impact on the configuration of the feminine: the doll (linked basically to contexts of pediophobia or fear of dolls).

Giving special attention to Spanish authors, I intend to elucidate whether the image of the doll in the realm of the fantastic has evolved from its first manifestations in cinema and literature up to modernity, transforming the representation of the feminine fantastic through its concretion in the doll. At the same time, the case study of the doll is approached in the light of the debates on the dichotomy between feminine fantastic and feminist fantastic,<sup>4</sup> in order to contribute to the reflection on the appropriateness of these labels.

## II

If we want to understand how images of the feminine are configured in the realm of the fantastic (including the one that is the subject of our analysis; the doll), we cannot ignore the firm influence exerted not only by artistic movements, but also by movements of a sociological and anthropological nature.

The attraction that surrealists feel to the motif of the praying mantis, whose eroticism and seduction was more powerful than the terror of being annihilated, runs parallel—with both peaking in the 1930s—to the rise in representations of disturbing dolls, a mixture of subversion and sadism, which characterized the movement,<sup>5</sup> and in particular, the trajectory of Hans Bellmer. Bellmer's sculptures and photographs reproduce incomplete, fragmented, dismembered, decomposed women; they are figures created from pieces (extremities) that articulate and fit together showing what constitutes a deconstruction of the female body. This is clearly objectified, born of fetishism and the eroticization that drove the avant-garde.<sup>6</sup> The humiliation and sexualization to which these figurations of the feminine are subjected, through the masculine gaze that constructs them, contribute to the accentuation of the grotesque and the disturbing halo of his famous *Poupée*.

Bellmer's proposal in the 1930s was inspired not only by Freudian theories but also by having attended a performance of Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, in which Olympia is brutally dismembered in the final scene. Bellmer's images actually enhanced, with its monstrosity, the artistic, literary use of the doll as an object of desire, which had preceded Bellmer, and which has continued in postmodernity. Cindy Sherman's artwork *Broken Dolls* (1999), a series of black and white photographs showing dismembered dolls, would be an example of the impact and influence exercised by Bellmer's art.<sup>7</sup>

In the Spanish context, literary texts and painting had already shown a tendency to be fascinated by the doll. The writer Gómez de la Serna gave the literary avant-garde a new artistic image of the

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of rewriting in Spanish short stories, see Velázquez "La reescritura."

<sup>4</sup> Or even between feminine fantastic and female fantastic, as stated in this special issue.

<sup>5</sup> Although the study of the fascination for objects that inspired avant-garde artists is not one of the aims of this work, it is worth mentioning the images that surrealism created from the figure of the mannequin (Man Ray, Dalí, Masson, Chirico), a motif that played a central role in the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, organised by Breton and Éluard, held in Paris in 1938.

<sup>6</sup> The title of Hal Foster's article, "Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus" (Mundy 203-222), refers to this trend shared by many surrealists.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth mentioning the collective work coordinated by Mariel Manrique in 2019, *Muñecas: el tiempo de la belleza y el terror* (*Dolls: the Time of Beauty and Horror*), with studies that cover different artistic fields.

object woman, this time using wax as the figuration material. His novel *El incongruente* (1922), and specifically its chapter XXII, "Huida hacia el pueblo de las muñecas de cera" ("Flight Towards the Village of Wax Dolls"), constitutes a literary projection of Gómez de la Serna's personal fascination with wax females. This writer's curiosity for automatons, mannequins, puppets or dolls, so many times referenced by critics, was shared by the artist Gutiérrez Solana, who engendered many pictorial images inspired by the inanimate beings with which he liked to surround himself.<sup>8</sup>

In preceding representations, this sexualization and this reification are embodied as inherent in the motif of the artificial woman. This is evident in nineteenth-century stories from the more generic sphere of non-mimetic or unusual literature (for example, the *Galateas* from *Der Sandmann* [1817], by Hoffmann; or from *L'Ève future* [1886] by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam), where also the disturbing emerges. In contrast, in the exclusive realm of the fantastic, the specific thematic motif of the diabolic doll seemed to have escaped this sexualization. In the story "La Muñequita" ("The Little Doll," 1894), the result of Juan Valera's intermittent incursions into the realm of the unusual, the inanimate protagonist comes to life as a consequence of the attention lavished on her by her new owner, the girl who dug her up in rags. As a story framed in the wonderful world of fairy tales, and with the typical irony of Valera's writing, sexualization did not form part of the descriptors of the inanimate being. Indeed, Valera's story, with the convenient moral of fairy tales, is an ode to virtue. The animation of the doll is explained by its "mission" to help achieve the aspirations of the young 15-year-old girl and her mother, which basically involves not allowing the king, or any male with power, to exercise any rights over the girl's body. This is so much the case that, as we read in the end of the story, the doll, "having already fulfilled its mission, ceased to talk, bite and do other things that are inappropriate for a doll" (Valera 1024).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in Valera's story, the diabolic doll, whose function in the plot is to act as an instrument, lives up to its name only with those characters that are none too virtuous, cruel, or ambitious. For the innocent girl, on the contrary, the doll is a faithful ally, an unusual role in the genre of the diabolic doll.

Around fifty years later, Algernon Blackwood proposes a new story around pediophobia, treating it very differently than Valera did, managing to provoke terror both inside and outside the borders of the text. Blackwood's "The Doll" (1946), like the Spanish fiction of 1894, discards the sexualization of the inanimate, preferring to focus on the instrumental function of the diabolic object (this is how the English writer makes the revenge effective), but unlike Valera, he sets his plot within the field of the fantastic genre, in line with the theorization of David Roas (2011). Indeed, in an everyday environment that is recognizable and familiar to the reader, the impossible breaks out: a doll that can trigger evil. The cook - disregarding Colonel Masters' instructions to get rid of the newly arrived package - decides to hand over its contents - what she thinks is a simple and harmless doll - to the Colonel's daughter. The doll's arrival unleashes a whole series of strange phenomena, starting with the animation of the doll itself, which will endanger the girl's life until the source of the evil is identified.

The way diabolic dolls such as Blackwood's are described moves away from the image usually associated with artificial dolls in the manner of the future Eve. In "The Doll" from 1946, grotesque ugliness is used to accentuate the terror of the demonic actions that will take place later: "Its face was pallid, white, expressionless, its flaxen hair was dirty, its tiny ill-shaped hands and fingers lay motionless by its side, its mouth was closed, though somehow grinning, no teeth visible, its eyelashes ridiculously like a worn toothbrush, its entire presentment in its flimsy skirt, contemptible, harmless, even ugly" (Blackwood 146). As I have already stated, dolls like Blackwood's place us within the realm of the fantastic, and this is the main framework that I have marked out for the analysis of this image of the feminine that has been cultivated in art, cinema and literature.

### III

At this point, I should point out something that might have been intuited or deduced from our discourse: although we can establish some relations with other genres (and it is convenient to do so), we have not included figures such as cyborgs, robots, androids or gynoids, or replicants in our study. All of these creatures belong to the genre of science fiction, and we situate them therefore, beyond the frontiers of the fantastic.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The creation of a life-size doll as a means of keeping the memory of the dead woman (to whom the clothes and hair of the inanimate copy belong) alive and tangible is precisely the axis of the plot of Vernon Lee's story "The Doll" (1896, 1927)--a realistic recreation (despite the dominance of the strange and disturbing) of the doll motif.

<sup>9</sup> Translation mine. Note: All the translations from the original Spanish language quoted in this article are mine.

<sup>10</sup> Those interested in these artificial females will find very complete studies in the excellent volumes by Teresa López-Pellisa, *Patologías de la realidad virtual* (*Pathologies of Virtual Reality*, 2015), or the previous one by Pilar

The dolls that I will consider here as objects likely to provoke fantastic terror are, in general, those that are supposedly immobile (at least initially, before the element of the impossible breaks into the story), or those with limited mechanical or electronically controlled movements, such as the most basic automata. In accordance with these premises, our corpus of texts includes mannequins; blow-up dolls; children's dolls like Nancy or Barbie and all their variants, whether talking or non-talking; puppets or marionettes; and dummies or ventriloquist dolls (although male variants dominate the latter group for the most part).

When we compare these two groups of female creatures, one of the differences that emerges at a first basic level of analysis is that there is a more evident assimilation between a machine and a woman than there is between a doll and a woman, with the exception of the mannequin or the sex doll whose purpose is to intentionally motivate the replica. It would seem clear that the potential offered by artificial dolls in science fiction explains the much smaller corpus within the fantastic genre, and also the minimal variations presented by the cinematic and literary tradition of diabolic dolls. These have more limited movements and do not raise the questions of "artificial ethics" or "robot ethics" that arise when dealing with androids.<sup>11</sup> However, in recent years, it is visible eroticization, both in the cinema and in the fantastic stories of diabolic dolls, that was not previously present, when the motivations of the inanimate being were basically materialized in revenge and murder. To those familiar with the genre, the diabolic female dolls (not as common as the male ones) that most readily come to mind might belong to cinematographic representations, especially of saga films, such as *Chucky* film franchise, or the series of *Anabelle*. The terror produced by the *Bride of Chucky* (1998) or *Annabelle* (2014, 2017, 2019) is emphasized by the ugliness and deterioration of the doll. These topics are still present, but at the same time they do not seem to be sufficient.

There are, in my opinion, several elements that condition this new orientation, and through which the subgenre of the devilish doll in its female version transits. First, we have the necessary processes of deautomatization faced by any writer who decides to walk along already trodden paths. The specific case of the thematic motif of the diabolic doll could be applied to other characters or prototypical motifs that make up and help define the fantastic. Due to its recurrence and permanence in the tradition, the male or female creator must work on the deautomatization of usual representations, in order to (breaking the expectations of the reader, who is too familiar with the actions performed by the diabolic doll, or with the configuration of its appearance) keep surprising readers and keep provoking the fantastic fear.

Second, we cannot get away from the communicating vessels that have been established between two arts or languages that have a long tradition of the motif, namely literature and cinema, which have undoubtedly determined their progression and development. Aspects such as the evolution of both the audiovisual arts and special effects might also have contributed to the changes that have taken place. On the one hand, they have promoted the fact that films from the 1990s do not arouse the same terror among today's viewers as they presumably did among viewers of the time, and on the other hand, they have facilitated the modification of the external appearance of the doll or the expansion of its capabilities. Thanks to these variations, and in spite of multiple revisits to, and remakes of, this already classic topic of the fantastic genre throughout the history of literature and cinema, it has been possible to continue exploring new paths of pediophobia.

Finally, we cannot avoid the transformations or even the "struggles" that are waged in society, and which find their echo in literature and film, especially from a gender perspective. For this reason, addressing the alleged feminine fantastic, or feminist fantastic (as I prefer here), means that we must analyze how this is shaped, modified, altered, or adapted, as the society in which it is contextualized or integrated does. Thus, the focus on the sexualization or eroticization of the diabolic doll, which was not considered previously, arises as a means of achieving deautomatization, offering new perspectives of an image that is too traditional. Be that as it may, on occasions, it occurs also as a way of demolishing the images of the feminine that are linked to stereotypes and tradition—in other words, with the intention of raising to the critical surface, questioning, subverting or counteracting those images of the feminine which, socially speaking, live a situation of encystment.

---

Pedraza, *Máquinas de amar* (*Love Machines*, 1998). The latter includes references that correspond to the broader field of the unusual.

<sup>11</sup> The scarce variety is evident in the cinema of devilish dolls, with multiple sequels and prequels that hinder the innovation of the source of terror, and that can end up falling into parody, as in the case of *Child's Play* (*Chucky*), still alive after seven films. There may still be some surprises, such a case being *Annabelle: Creation* (2015), which critics generally consider to be better than its predecessor.



I would now like to expand on this last point, which starts from the hypothesis that the updating of the motif of the diabolic doll can be seen, to a large extent, as a materialization of contemporary concerns of a social and identity nature. The following example clearly illustrates these two-way transfers between sociology and literature (in this case the science fiction genre). On July 31, 2017, *The Guardian* published a news item announcing, "a surge [by border officers] in the number of seizures of child-like sex dolls, [as heavy as a seven-year-old child]". When asked, the officers conducting the investigation anticipated the future and predicted: "[These dolls are] the precursor to more sophisticated child sex robots, which [are] just around the corner"<sup>12</sup>. Five years earlier, the Spanish writer Care Santos had written "Aria de la muñeca mecánica" (Aria of the Mechanical Doll), a story structured around gynoids created exclusively for male pleasure. These artificial women, presented ceremoniously to potential users, included the Vicky model: available "in any of the options already explained, with the particularity that its height does not exceed one hundred and forty centimeters and its appearance is that of a girl of about ten" (Santos 114).

Apart from condemnable sexual paraphilias, today we have a complete series of social phenomena that have contributed, among other aspects, to the revitalization of the topic of the devilish doll in the literature and cinema of the current century. These phenomena are fundamentally linked to two processes: the dollification of the human and the humanization of the inanimate. This usually provokes a close reaction to what Freud defined as *Unheimliche* in 1919, or what Masahiro Mori diagnosed back in 1970 as the *Uncanny Valley* within the field of anthropomorphic robotics. This feeling of the uncanny which, starting with Jentsch (1906) and exemplified by *Der Sandmann*, Freud related to the "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate" (Freud 378). It overrides so many social phenomena of contemporary times, that it is not so farfetched to associate it with the emergence of the various revivals of the diabolic doll in the twenty first century.

The eroticized image of the doll that has entered postmodern texts, and fantastic fiction in particular (it has never been absent from science fiction) can be explained, as I indicated earlier, by the generalization of two directions that hover over today's society, which have a greater impact on women and the image that is configured of them. I am referring, first of all, to the tendency to dollify the girl/woman (*doll-girl*), and secondly, to humanize/animate the doll (*girl-doll*). Both processes of dollification and humanization encompass different materializations or concretions (patterns) that contribute to the construction of a hypersexualized climate of an all-sided nature—due to its enormous scope of action (social networks, television, fashion, leisure; culture in its broadest sense), which doesn't go unnoticed by male and female creators. If a direct influence of society on writing, or vice versa, may be more difficult to prove, it is feasible to admit, at the very least, that the portrayal of the image of the feminine in literature or film either joins this climate by supporting it in some way, or else it subverts it.

Confronting the first of these two processes, the dollification of women, forces us to make a brief stop at *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, the work that British feminist Natasha Walter published in 2010. The author uses the metaphor that lends the book its title to point directly to the gender constructions that socially determine the values on which many girls base their future. Since childhood they have been pressured to look attractive and perfect and to respond to gender stereotypes or expectations. Magazines such as Walt Disney's *Princess* or the one that originated from *Bratz*, or even real companies such as the British "Princess-Prep" (something like a "School for Princesses"), which propose a seven-day training course to become a true princess, clearly define the dollification of the female body that takes place from childhood. Thus, in Walter's opinion, the image of today's hypersexualized living woman is the result of the early association between femininity and sexual attractiveness (14). Girls are not only expected to play with dolls, but to become replicas of their favorite toys. Contextualized in British culture, the study analyzes different areas (men's magazines, nightclub shows, pornography, children's films) that reveal the objectification and sexualization of the girl/woman, and lead Walter to assert: "Through the glamour-modelling culture, through the mainstreaming of pornography and the new acceptability of the sex industry, through the modishness of lap and pole-dancing, through the sexualisation of young girls, many young women are being surrounded by a culture in which they are all body and only body" (125).

Postmodernity brings with it a new Galatea, one who sadly models herself to respond to the still prevailing image of a feminine ideal that has not been conceived by her. For Pilar Pedraza, this Galatea constitutes "one of the least intelligent female perversions of our time" ("Pigmalión" 47). This

<sup>12</sup> "Child sex doll imports expose previously unknown offenders." [www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/31/child-sex-doll-imports-expose-previously-unknown-offenders](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/31/child-sex-doll-imports-expose-previously-unknown-offenders). Accessed 13 Aug. 2017.

bondage to a beauty canon has resulted in the extreme, but increasingly widespread posture embodied by the so-called *babydolls*, or *Barbie dolls*; girls (and boys to a lesser extent) who model their bodies, dress up, and put on their makeup to resemble a living doll.

The possibilities of expansion offered by social networks have contributed to the fact that girls such as the so-called Ukrainian Barbie Valeria Lukyanova, or the Swiss Venus Angelic (Venus Palermo) receive millions of hits on Instagram or YouTube with tutorials on "How to Look Like a Doll"<sup>13</sup>. In them, they explain and show, on a step-by-step basis, how to imitate the appearance of a BJD (ball jointed doll), with the velvety skin of a porcelain doll and its "deep and mysterious" eyes, including the silhouette, and even resorting to surgery if necessary.

Together with this trend towards the dollification of women, we are also currently witnessing processes involving the humanization of the doll, with an evident inclination towards hyperrealism. Once again, society offers us several examples of these processes, which will bring us closer to *the Uncanny Valley* and the Freudian ominous. Therefore, this moves the doll closer to provoking the fantastic effect, to unleashing the impossible.

First of all, we must make a stop at the growing community of reborn babies, hyper-realistic dolls that have been created with the desire to copy newborn babies down to the smallest detail (size, weight, skin veins, saliva, hair, etc.), who will be "adopted", not purchased, to cite the language used by the reborn community. This increasingly extended social phenomenon constitutes a new extreme that borders on the ominous, in this case within the humanization of the inanimate. Those who introduce these dolls into their lives (for collection purposes or as a means of coping with loss, or as an alternative to their inability to have children) usually follow the same daily routines that they would devote to a human baby: bathing, feeding, walking, etc. They also have the support of the corresponding tutorial videos, and a community with which they share and communicate the experience. Regardless of its possible therapeutic uses, one of the reactions that this social phenomenon usually provokes among curious observers (sometimes the *reborn babies* are copies of a real model<sup>14</sup>) is its connection with the "creepy", the "freaky", or the "uncanny."<sup>15</sup>

This perception or sensation reappears with another of the concretizations of the process of humanizing the inanimate in parallel with reborn *babies*. I am referring here to the work of artists such as the Russian Michael Zajkov whose hyperrealist dolls are mostly acquired by collectors. Although they are not created to life size, the artist seeks to make the doll look as similar as possible as its human referent. This has resulted in the emergence of the disturbing, an adjective which, together with its synonyms, has been repeatedly used to describe Zajkov's art in those news press and art blogs that have echoed some of his exhibitions, or which have hosted reviews of his career.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning the social phenomenon of the humanization of the doll, which has been the most extended in time and which also occupies an unquestionable place in our present. This is the sex toy doll (sometimes just a chaste companion), which has also been subject to a process of improvement throughout the history of its manufacture in order to achieve a greater level of hyperrealism. While the first copies were made from materials such as wax, cloth, plastic or polyurethane, today's most expensive current models are made from silicone and they try to achieve a maximum assimilation between doll and woman,<sup>17</sup> equivalent to the similarity between the human

<sup>13</sup> The number of visualizations that these tutorial videos attract (that by Venus Angelic, for example, now has more than 16 million) gives us an idea of the magnitude of the phenomenon. [See www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojYBcMFkdfY&t=199s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojYBcMFkdfY&t=199s). Accessed 4 Dec. 2019.

<sup>14</sup> The episode "Be Right Back" (2013) from the science fiction series *Black Mirror* offers a new example of the communicating vessels that are established between society and fiction. The loss of her partner is what leads the protagonist to take advantage of the advances in technology and to acquire an android modeled on her boyfriend's appearance. The uncanny valley emerges when she understands (and accepts) that there is just an *almost* total correspondence between the copy and the image. Lacking free will and without any habits, emotions or empathy, the android connects with the uncanny, and the only possible reaction is rejection.

<sup>15</sup> This bonding brought about by the hyperrealism of these expensive dolls, and therefore their proximity to the *Uncanny Valley*, was precisely the thing that made it possible for variants of the monster baby - the zombie baby or the vampire baby - to be "born" among the *reborn babies*.

<sup>16</sup> "Beautiful or just creepy? Russian artist creates dolls that are so eerily realistic that even he admits they make people feel uncomfortable." *The Daily Mail*, 25 Jan. 2016, [www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3410510/Russian-artist-creates-dolls-eerily-realistic.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3410510/Russian-artist-creates-dolls-eerily-realistic.html). Accessed 12 May 2019.

<sup>17</sup> The opening of the first silicone doll brothel in Spain in April 2017 (a fairly frequent practice in Japan, one of the main exporters of inflatable dolls) gives us an idea of the social dimension that this doll-woman assimilation has reached, and the fetishistic need of some adults to relate only (or temporarily) with dolls.



being and the android that is sought in science fiction.<sup>18</sup> Like the reborn baby, this implies a procedure of substitution, and identification that connects to the double, which is one of the classic thematic motifs of the genre. From a different perspective and with a different treatment, the turn of the screw that the doll makes as a double becomes the vertebral axis of stories such as "Las Hortensias" ("The Hortensias," 1949) by Felisberto Hernández, or "La muñeca menor" ("The Youngest Doll," 1972) by Rosario Ferré.

In fact, fictional forms (and cinema in particular) have also tried on many occasions to artistically recreate this particular humanization of the inanimate, although almost always from a realist approach. The classics *No es bueno que el hombre esté solo* (*It Is Not Good for the Man to Be Alone*, 1973) by Pedro Olea; and *Tamaño natural* (*Natural Size*, 1973) by Luis García Berlanga; or the more recent *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007) by Craig Gillespie (with a screenplay by Nancy Oliver) are some examples. The protagonist's relationship with the inflatable doll is revealed in these films as a symptom associated with a personal disorder: affective deficiencies; the loss of a partner; difficulties establishing normative relationships, or fatigue with such relationships.

Man becomes the creator/God who molds the ideal woman, his Hadaly, from the silicone mud. In the case of the sex doll, with its "factory settings," man improves it just as Professor Higgins intends with Eliza in Bernard Shaw's adaptation of *Pygmalion* (1913). The "owner" chooses the personality he desires for his doll, and the preconstructed ideal emerges by inventing the dialogues with his inanimate female interlocutor: docile, submissive, and almost always silent.

In the micro story ("La muñeca hinchable"), Tomeo subverts the obvious monologue demanded by the inflatable doll, which is defined as having no voice, and not providing, as the inconsolable owner recalls, "not a single recrimination, not a single word louder than another" (Tomeo 477). The author still adds a fantastic twist to the story when to the question asked by his friend of: "who was, in that monologue, the only one who spoke?" The already ex-owner of the doll answers "She" (Ella). The friend's response will be implacable and expressed with the most natural logic: "Well, it is no wonder that in the end that inflatable doll went with someone else. [...] The silence would bore anyone." (Tomeo 477)

Taking into account the sinister ingredient that underlies this type of doll-woman assimilation, moving from these realistic approaches to the fantastic genre was only a matter of time. Director Robert Parigi had experimented with horror genre in *Love Object* (2003) by pushing the relationship between the protagonist and the acquired doll to the limit. But in *Air Doll* (*Kūki Ningyō*), the Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda places the inflatable doll within the realm of the fantastic (bordering on the marvelous at some points of the story) for the first time. Unlike previous recreations, Kore-eda rehearses the animation of the inanimate. While the doll will continue to maintain its plastic body, she will be filled with a soul and a voice on her own, which will allow her to discover the world before she allows herself to die by deflating slowly. The owner's reaction to the surprise of her new state focuses on the problems of human relations and communication; he begs her to become an inert object again, to stop talking, because her voice makes her too close to a real woman.

Despite being conceived, like the others, by a male director, in *Air Doll* (2009), the image of the feminine that used to represent the subgenre of the inflatable doll is transformed. Once the angle is changed, the world (including the reification, the sexualization that it has been subjected to) is observed from the viewpoint of the doll, which contributes to emphasizing the disturbing and spine-chilling feeling caused by her abuse by men. The feeling of loneliness and the sense of non-belonging (even the melancholic poetry with which the story is rendered) transmitted by Kore-eda's work are shared by the series of photographs that the artist Laurie Simmons exhibited under the title of "The Love Doll" (2009-2011). This exhibition consisted of images that she had taken of a life-size doll in different poses and everyday situations,<sup>19</sup> and had a similar purpose and result as the Japanese director, notwithstanding the different artistic language and the different gender of their creators.

It is clear that the animation of the doll in *Air Doll* promotes a greater empathy in the viewer compared to previous recreations, and consequently, this distances it from the *uncanny valley*. Once the animation of the doll has been accepted, the sexual use by her owner (or her boss) and her immediately remaining still (as an act of self-defense) as soon as this occurs, are perceived as

<sup>18</sup> The Andreida *The Future Eve* by Villiers de L'Isle also arises as a desire to replace the real woman and to improve her. Unable to bear Alice's remoteness, the protagonist is also incapable of living with such stupidity.

<sup>19</sup> Laurie Simmons' interest in the established relationships between human beings and inanimate has marked her entire career. Prior to "The Love Doll", she had dedicated an exhibition to Doll Girls, entitled "Dollers and How We See" (2014), and another to Talking Objects (1987-1989), based on photographs she took of ventriloquist dolls over several years.

aggression and rape. The viewer had experienced this same sensation before in the French-Spanish film *Tamaño natural*, specifically in the sequence in which Michel's wife undergoes dollification in order to attract her husband's attention, only to end up being mistreated by him. A real woman cannot become - beyond a feigned pose - the passive and silent doll desired by Michel to meet his ideal.

Hispanic fiction has offered us different representations of rape through the aggression suffered by inanimate beings in stories whose fantastic effect has broken through by giving them some [+human] traits. The identification between doll (or any of its variants) and woman favors the use of rape as a literary motif, which gives the fantastic a social commitment that has usually been denied to the genre. The fact that the two literary samples that I refer to below have male authors would constitute another example of the inappropriateness of continuing to defend, at least in total terms, the thesis of the existence of essentially "female" themes, especially when rape is focused on the suffering of the victim in both cases.

The story "Belzebuth", collected in *El elogio de la nieve y doce cuentos más* (*The Praise of the Snow and Twelve More Stories*, 1998) by the Uruguayan writer Hugo Burel, takes place in a department store in Montevideo. Its basement houses mannequins made from different materials, some abandoned to their fate and replaced by more sophisticated models; others awaiting their final destination on the window of some great avenue. The basement chronotope and the "life" that lives there (narrated by a mannequin) works as an objective correlate of human relations, with the evidence that Burel's dummies display more humanity than the humans who deal with them. Two new-generation mannequins come to this layer of reality where the mannequins are animated, love, and suffer from jealousy. These are Jean Pierre and Marilyn, who will be subjected to the torture that the group of men present there like to dish out.<sup>20</sup> The torment includes what the reader understands as Marilyn's rape, with the mannequin humanized as the inflatable doll seen in *Air Doll*. The writer describes in all its crudeness, the opening of a hole in the Marilyn mannequin using metal punches in order to house Jean Pierre's artificial penis, while the other mannequins, terrified, stay "[...] waiting for two men to complete the fierce task of opening a path between the legs of the wretch. Held by firm arms, she endured the torment of the metal punches that undermined with dry blows the lower mass of her trunk" (Burel 99). The oppressive atmosphere with which Burel characterizes his basement, which is manifested more intensively in the rape scene, conveys one of the central ideas of his story. This can be synthesized, in agreement with Aínsa, in that "cruelty and violence remains, despite the 'dummy' condition of the mannequins, the privilege of human beings" (152).

The Spanish author Miguel Ángel Zapata (in whose texts puppet animation has been frequently rehearsed) opts for the short narrative form to fictionalize—also within the boundaries of the fantastic—the rape of those who appear to be inanimate. His micro story number XII, which is included in *Revelaciones y magias* (*Revelations and Magic*, 2009), strikes the reader as forcefully as Burel's story does. In this case, it is the animation of a wood carving (a young virgin dancing joyfully, in the company of "a herd" of five satyrs) that triggers the horror. When the carver, who has only completed the sculptural group moments before, returns to the studio:

He discovers with horror that the nymph lies curled up in a corner of the room, on a blood spot that flows from her crotch, and he can perceive a motionless fright of terrified wood in her eyes, looking at him calling out for help voiceless. Scattered around the studio, the rest of the carvings, the satyrs, are eternalized in still gestures of novel distribution. One whistles and looks at the floor, another shrugs his shoulders confronting with mockery the sculptor, a third one was fixed in abortive escape with one foot beyond the window sill, a fourth one looks dreadfully at Zappatini while pointing his finger at the entrance to the studio, at the artist's back, warning, perhaps in a mute and urgent alarm, as only wood can prevent. (Zapata 23)

In both Burel and Zapata's stories, the selection of the lexicon for the narration of what happened is decisive, especially the verbs and adjectives that subcategorize human agents or patients in their semantic description. For example, we read how Burel's "wretched" (*desdichada*) mannequin "endured the torment" (*soportaba el tormento*); while Zapata's nymph "lies curled up" (*yace acurrucada*), with a terrified and pleading look. The lexicon thus separates the victim from her condition as an inanimate object, thereby accentuating both the transmitted terror and the atrocity of the action.

These representations are a new revelation that the degree of commitment, even of "feminism", shown in the texts, whether fantastic or not, depends on the creator's conscience (male or female), on their willingness to turn literature into a space for denunciation, but not on their gender. If we did not

<sup>20</sup> See Gatti, 2012.

know the authorship, we could fall into the same error of the critic Robert Silverberg.<sup>21</sup> It would be risky to identify, without any doubt or hesitation, who might be behind the way of describing, at least in the cases referred to above, the brutal attacks on the Marilyn mannequin or on the young nymph.

#### IV

The distinctive hyperrealism of the postmodern doll, whose maximum exponent is the life-size inflatable doll (also the mannequin), has also progressively penetrated the world of children's toys, the main source for the devilish doll motif. "The New Crew" of Barbie dolls, announced in 2017 consisted of "40 new dolls, 7 body types, 11 skintones, 28 hairstyles."<sup>22</sup> This remodeling was carried out with the clear intention of seeking a greater correspondence between the universe of the famous couple of dolls and the real universe of children. In the light of the evolution of the child doll, it does not seem unreasonable to affirm that the cinema and literature of the twenty-first century sexualize the description of the diabolical (fantastic) doll in parallel with the way Mattel does with its *Barbies* or its *Monster High*; or as MGA does with its *Bratz*.

The most symptomatic paradigm of this particular evolution of the motif is provided by the film *The Doll* (2017). This presents a striking fusion, from a sociological point of view, of the processes of dollification and humanization that we have already seen as the diabolic doll is played in this film by the human Barbie Valeria Lukyanova, who I mentioned earlier in these pages. Thus, on the big screen, the woman-doll becomes the possessed and diabolic doll-woman, who exists to kill, and control the minds of others; in this case, the teenagers who have requested an escort doll on the Internet. The embodiment of evil in the erotic beauty of *The Doll's* protagonist is a novelty within the genre of slasher horror movies; but from the viewpoint of the represented image of the feminine, it is difficult to see it as groundbreaking. The fact that this horror and fantastic film (bordering on science fiction) has been written and directed by a woman, the director Susannah O'Brien, adds another example that helps to sustain the core idea behind this work. Indeed, it is quite arduous to establish the (apparently arbitrary) correlation between the images of the feminine provided by film and literature, and the gender of those who create them; and consequently it is difficult to continue supporting the existence of a genuine, idiosyncratic, feminine fantastic.

In Susannah O'Brien's film, maintaining a multitude of stereotypes about the feminine undoubtedly results in a product that is not very subversive. However, the eroticization and sexualization applied in her incursion into the genre represent a new turn in diabolic-doll cinema, which has traditionally opted to represent the doll by using ugliness and abomination to contribute to the terrifying effect. The horror aroused by the spooky grimaces of the killer doll in *Dolly Dearest* (1991) or Annabelle's horrifying gaze, for example, has traditionally been accompanied by the diabolic doll's demure dress and hairstyle. Annabelle continues to come home in 2019, barely exposing any area of her porcelain skin and keeping her innocent braids in the manner of her predecessor "Talky Tina", from the *Twilight Zone* series ("Living Doll," 1963). As for the *Bride of Chucky* (1998), the most that happened to her was preserving the gothic look makeup that singled her out in real life, but basically, she was defined by taking the same pleasure in murder as her male partner Chucky. Of the three examples mentioned, with a similar treatment of the diabolic doll (considering the variants, budget differences, different years of release), there is only one case where the creator is a female. And while in a blind identification of the female fantastic, we would tend to opt for the 1963 piece of fiction in which the doll exercises the poetic justice of annihilating an abusive father and husband, we would be wrong to imagine a creative woman behind the story. And yet, this episode of one of the most emblematic series on television could be categorized under the denomination of feminist fantastic, once again disconnected from the gender of the author.

And what about the postmodern story? What vision does it give us back? In contrast to the aforementioned samples of diabolic doll cinema, the current fantastic (feminist fantastic) narrative does benefit from the recreation of the doll's feminine beauty according to patriarchal canons. These beauty canons also include the two images with which women have traditionally been represented; "the angel in the house", and the "femme fatale". Patricia Esteban Erlés is the Spanish writer driving

<sup>21</sup> The anecdote around James Tiptree Jr, which seems to invalidate the differentiation between male and female writing and language, has been cited on more than one occasion. Before the true identity behind that pseudonym (a woman, Alice Sheldon) was discovered in the late 1970s, the writer and critic Robert Silverberg had stated with absolute firmness that it was a man: "It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing." ("The Secret Sci-Fi Life of Alice B. Sheldon." NPR.org. p. 3).

<sup>22</sup> <https://barbie.mattel.com/en-us/about/fashionistas.html>. Accessed 6 Dec. 2018.

this change most firmly. The little girls who are the main characters in the micro-stories of her book *Casa de muñecas* (Doll's House, 2012), just like any real girl who acquires a Barbie or a Bratz, will be attracted to the "way of life" or lifestyle that these dolls represent and which they will want to imitate. That attraction will be the seed of the irruption of the impossible. It is no coincidence that one of the stories by *Casa de muñecas'* writer is entitled "Primeras maestras" ("First Schoolmistresses") (Esteban Erlés 24), since dolls - both for fictional and real girls - seem to guide the aesthetic and behavioral ideals during childhood:

We learned about perfection from our dolls. We learned from them the motionless curls, knees together if wearing a skirt, a discreetly geranium-colored smile, and the clean-glass look that should be shown to adults in suits. We also learned that they would outlive us, that they would watch over our absence from the same unflappable shelf, like gargoyles in a children's room. We were taught death and that day we decided to change the rules of the game, smiling, politely as we pulled back a little more than we should, brushing their glossy hair of gloomy girls. (Esteban Erlés 24)

Certainly, the development of hyperrealism and the potential of the child doll has benefited the cinema and literature of the devilish doll. Having overcome the barrier of silence of the first automatons (Jaquet-Droz, 18th century) and the first of Edison's talking dolls (1890), the new automatons of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are dolls who can cry, pee, whisper, laugh out loud, or say "I love you" in various languages. The ominous effect that some of these dolls transmit could not be eluded by the fantastic genre. Once these dolls are placed in the diffuse frontiers that separate the living and the dead, the inanimate and the inert, the impossible will break in, the disturbing will emerge. We may recall that Chucky, whose saga began in 1988 with the "possession" of a Good Guy doll, was inspired by the best-selling Best Buddy, which was released in 1985.

The Spanish writer David Roas takes advantage of the multiple capabilities that have been acquired by postmodern dolls to give an unexpected turn to the tradition of this literary motif. In his story "Casa con muñecas" ("House with Dolls," *Invasión*, 2018), the terror associated with the doll is not linked to death. The protagonist does not face killer dolls who are seeking revenge, and there is no desire to invade bodies or control consciences either. On the contrary, the only motivation of the doll imagined by Roas is sexual, exploring the eroticization of the child doll to one end. The atmosphere that the writer creates in his story gradually prepares the reader for Pablo's distressing experience in Marta's room, an alarming universe overloaded with child dolls. Roas maintains the ambiguity as to whether Marta is aware of the ominous burden of that room; or if in what happens, there is part of a disturbing implicit pact between the mistress and her dolls, with whom, as Marta confesses, she shares everything. The sexual encounter of the protagonists seems to be preceded by the ritual arrangement: "all [the dolls] facing the bed" (Roas 48), "the favorite ones placed by the bedside table" (Roas 49). When Pablo and Marta finish the sexual act, the expectant dolls no longer show, as he discovers in terror, an indifferent gaze. Shortly after, having brought himself back to pleasure, Pablo notices "small caresses", "quick and delicate grazes with the tip of the tongue", "small nibbles" (Roas 50) which, with Marta still asleep, preannounce what the room is hiding. Indeed, what Pablo is experiencing is the incarnation of the traditional sex doll in a not so traditional child doll. This sexual function of the child doll, with a long tradition in science fiction depicting artificial females, is new to the fantastic genre.

## V

The current narrative is not alien to the long cinematographic tradition of the diabolical doll motif. The topic remains a rich source from which to take (and alter) some of its most prototypical elements, always with the aim of trying to deautomatize a subgenre that presents few variations, usually focused on the causes of animation, the origin of the doll, or the goals that are pursued by the latter. In the century between Ernst Lubitsch's *Die Puppe* (1919) and Gary Dauberman's *Annabelle Comes Home* (2019), there are more than forty cinematographic adaptations of this motif, and notwithstanding the variations, two fixed and recurring themes can be identified as defining the status of the devilish doll. Firstly, the need for a "servant" over whom to exercise their domination and control ("She won't let me" the girl enslaved and frightened by Mary Allen keeps repeating in the *Bride of the Living Dummy* [1998]). Secondly, the urgency to occupy and possess a human body in order to overcome the limitations of vinyl, wood, or porcelain--"temporary rentals" only.

The Spanish narrative of the present century transfers these two thematic nuclei associated with plots involving diabolical dolls to writing, but it does so in a provocative and novel manner, in which evil and the maleficent are presented as something idiosyncratic and naturalized in a child's world.

Patricia Esteban Erlés, the writer who has used the deautomatization of pediophobia and child innocence the most, combines the doll's controlling power over the girl, the serial killer, and gender construction criticism in her story "Killer Barbies" from *Casa de muñecas*. This fusion of perspectives turns this text into a clear and representative example of the feminist fantastic. The first-person narrator confesses with the utmost naturalness: "As a child I became a serial killer" (Esteban Erlés 29). The reader soon discovers that the victims are the Barbies of her friends, the symbol of an artificial and unattainable canon of beauty, with their "blue-stewardess eyes", and their "platinum blonde hair." Behind this extermination, there is the Nancy doll, who wants to put an end to the patriarchal construction of the feminine ideal. She acts in this way not just on her own behalf, but for "all" the little girls as well. With the same spontaneity shown in the beginning, the protagonist wonders "how to explain that it was a Nancy, overweight and in a nightgown one would expect to see on a Spanish woman from the provinces, the one who whispered to me every night, leaning on my pillow, that it was best for all of us girls" (Esteban Erlés 29).

The tradition, especially the cinematographic one, representing the diabolic game that is established between doll and child has always identified the roles of victim and executioner very clearly. The boy or girl, who had innocently approached the doll is dragged along by the doll's evil wishes. The spectator suffers with the child, feels uneasy each time the doll stalks or fixes its cold and expressionless gaze. However, attracted by child malice, Patricia Esteban Erlés reverses the roles and focuses the source of fear on the no longer innocent child. Although we have seen morally monstrous children represented in other cinematographic or literary genres, this line taken by Esteban Erlés is original in the fantastic themes involving devilish dolls (female or male) that have been revisited in the twenty-first century.<sup>23</sup> The little girl from *Casa de muñecas* is now an evil governess and the mistress of her creatures who are only inert in appearance. Just as a dictator or feudal lord continually fears the mutiny or rebellion of his subjects, the girl is suspicious of betrayal and conspiracy and will do all she can to stop it before it happens, even if this means the destruction of her kingdom. The clearest example of this is "Holocausto" ("Holocaust"), a premonitory title that refers to the end that awaits the dolls. The relationship of domination that the girl establishes from the outset, and which, in her opinion, justifies her actions, is indisputable for her: "I always thought that I was their queen, and that their destinies belonged to me. I was the owner of that mute swarm" (Esteban Erlés 27). Sensing a conspiracy among the dolls "in the pose of false innocence of the one who poisons every emperor," she decides to annihilate them by burning the "little traitors" on the grandmother's brazier and pronouncing the traditional declaration of the evil witch of the kingdom: "I am the queen". (Esteban Erlés 27).

Together with the need for control, I mentioned the urge the doll experiences to put the transmigration of their soul into effect. While the directional movement from doll to human is predominant in the cinematographic tradition, in the twenty-first century it is promoted in the opposite direction, which is even more disturbing insofar as it results in an anguishing and oppressive end. It will be the soul or spirit of the human being that suddenly discovers itself to be locked up in the inanimate object. The agent becomes the patient, or rather, the recipient. The only trace that will expose the human origin of that doll inhabited by life, in a very suggestive change of perspective resides precisely in the element that best connects the doll with the inert: the look. All the claustrophobic horror is enclosed in that trapped look, crying out for help voiceless, and the reader or viewer looks on in anguish. The excellent and terrifying animated short *Alma* (Rodrigo Blaas, 2009), which evokes and updates the end of the nineteenth-century story "La princesa y el granuja" (The Princess and the Rascal) (1877) by Benito Pérez Galdós; as well as the micro-stories "Rosebud," "La intrusa" (The Intruder), or even "Rosaura" (2012) by Patricia Esteban Erlés are examples of this type of deautomatization.

In the dollification of the living reproduced by the aforementioned textual products (which could be read as a metaphor for the sociological phenomena I referred to earlier), it is, as I argued, Patricia Esteban Erlés who shakes the traditional representation of the diabolic doll motif with the greatest virulence and who most comfortably embodies the "feminist fantastic" tag in doing so. First, because she strips the girl of her traditional candid and innocent attributes, making her the monstrous protagonist of her fantastic stories. And second, because by giving a woman the role of the "evil one in the fairy tale," far from perpetuating the image of *donna diavola*, she is contributing to taking her out of her orbital roles, thus ending her silencing. The singularities of Patricia Esteban Erlés' work

<sup>23</sup> In a somewhat more traditional approach, with echoes of the Annabelle doll, José Antonio Francés offers us a softer domination of the doll over the girl in his story "Carla", included in his volume of short short stories *Miedo me da* (2007: 119-120).



could lead us to extrapolate the idea (erroneously, in my opinion) that there is a certain feminine fantastic, in which female writers consciously make their gender visible by making women the agentive protagonists of their stories, giving them fictional space and, above all, a voice. Nonetheless, all of this - which does indeed happen - specifically and exclusively defines Esteban Erlés' universe (although parallels can be drawn with other female authors) and it is part of her literary commitment.

The case of the diabolic doll, the principal axis through which I have structured this work, insists on the complexity of contrasting the image of the feminine drawn by women (and therefore, a female fantastic) with that drawn by men (we should give some consideration to the reasons why the label "masculine/male fantastic" has not been extended), since exceptions to the rule would appear at every step. The reality of the concept of feminist fantastic would encounter the same difficulties. In the specific cases at hand, a reduced corpus could easily be accommodated to the thesis that male and female writers represent the diabolic doll motif, and along with it, the image of the feminine, in different ways. We could assert, for example, that Lluís Rueda takes a step forward in "Coletas Tracy" (Tracy Pigtales, 2017) by offering us one of the few existing products with a female ventriloquist doll (after a long tradition of male dolls and male ventriloquists), thus expanding the fictional space for women. However, when addressing the motif approach chosen by Rueda, we discover a stereotypical representation in which the motivation of the "Coletas Tracy" doll to "feed" on an increasingly frail Darcy Newman is not to achieve greater success on stage, nor economic ambition, a thirst for revenge, or pleasure with murder. Her reason is to keep the magician shared by doll and ventriloquist for herself in a chilling love triangle; it is a dispute over a man.

We might also venture to say that the fact that "Caesar and Me" (1964), an episode of the series *The Twilight Zone*, was written by a woman, Adele T. Strassfield, explains its riskier approach despite the fact that the main characters are a male ventriloquist and a male doll. It is in fact a girl who (in line with Esteban Erlés) eventually uses her intelligence (and her perversity) to enter an alliance with the doll. She is not only "used," but she "uses" as well in order to escape the prosaicism that surrounds her, and kill her aunt in the process should it be necessary.

Nevertheless, the examples with which I have conveyed our discourse throughout this article indicate that it is necessary to place the emphasis on the image of the feminine rather than on the constructor (male or female) of that image, since the universe of the feminine fantastic, or the perspective of the feminist fantastic, are individual choices. The most appropriate path is that which stops and focuses on the analysis of the act of enunciating and on the enunciation that every textual product reveals rather than on the gender of the producer. Perhaps, it is in this way that we will see the phrase *feminine fantastic* start to dissolve.

### Works Cited

- Aínsa, Fernando. *Del canon a la periferia: encuentros y transgresiones en la literatura uruguaya*. Montevideo, Trilce, 2002.
- Bellmer, Hans. La Poupée1935-36www.artnet.com/artists/hans-bellmer/die-puppe-fpVpuAiMcIF04SHbSyEMng2. Accessed 15 Dec 2019.
- Blaas, Rodrigo. Alma. Co-produced by Spain-United States, Independent, User T-38, 2009.
- Blackwood, Algernon. "The Doll.". *Ghost, Supernatural & Mystic Tales*. Vol. 2. Cornwall, House of Status, 2014, pp. 141-176.
- Bradshaw, Randy, director. "Bride of the Living Dummy". *Goosebumps*.season 3, episode 16, 1998. Based on the books by R. L. Stine.
- Brooker, Charlie, writer /Harris, Owen, director]. "Be right back". *Black Mirror*. Endemol,11 Feb. 2013.
- Burel, Hugo. "Belzebuth." *El elogio de la nieve y 12 cuentos más*. Montevideo, Alfaguara, 1998.
- Butler, Robert,Director/Adele T. Strassfield, Writer.: "Caesar and me", *The Twilight Zone*.season 5, episode 28, CBS All Access, 1964.
- Daily Mail, The. "Beautiful or just creepy? Russian artist creates dolls that are so eerily realistic that even he admits they make people feel uncomfortable". *The Daily Mail*, 25 Jan. 2016, [www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3410510/Russian-artist-creates-dolls-eerily-realistic.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3410510/Russian-artist-creates-dolls-eerily-realistic.html). Accessed 5 Dec. 2019.
- Dauberman, Gary. *Annabelle comes home*. Warner Bros., 2019.
- Ellmann, Mary. *Thinking about Women*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.
- Esteban Erlés, Patricia. *Casa de muñecas*. Madrid, Páginas de Espuma, 2012.
- Esteves, Araceli. *Fisuras en el aire*. Madrid, Eugenio Caro, 2013.
- Ferré, Rosario. "La muñeca menor". 1972. *Papeles de Pandora*. México,Joaquín Morriz, 1976. Published for the first time in the magazine *Zona Carga y Descarga*, 1 (1972), pp. 15-6.
- Foster, Hal. "Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus." *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, Jennifer Mund,editor. exhibition catalogue. London, Tate Modern, 2001, pp. 203-22.
- Francés, José Antonio. "Carla." *Miedo me da. 78 relatos de humor y espanto*. Sevilla, Algaida, 2007, pp. 119-20.
- Freud, Sigmund.*Collected Papers*. New York, Basic Books, 1959.

- García Berlanga, Luis, Director/Azcona, Rafael, Screenplay. *Tamaño natural*. France-Italy-Spain, Cinema International Corporation, 1973.
- Gatti Riccardi, Giuseppe. "Autómatas y maniqués en la literatura uruguaya: el motivo de la muñeca en la narrativa de los montevidianos Felisberto Hernández y Hugo Burel." *Lejana* (University Eötvös Loránd of Budapest), no. 4, 2012.
- Gillespie, Craig, Director/ Oliver, Nancy, Screenplay. *Lars and the Real Girl*. Canada/United States, Fórum Hungary, 2007.
- Gómez de la Serna, Ramón. *El Incongruente*. Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1922.
- Guardian, The. "Child sex doll imports expose previously unknown offenders", 31 Jul. 2017, [www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/31/child-sex-doll-imports-expose-previously-known-offenders](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/31/child-sex-doll-imports-expose-previously-known-offenders). Accessed 13 Aug. 2017.
- Hernández, Felisberto. *Las Hortensias*. 1949. Barcelona, Lumen, 1974.
- Hoffman, E.T.A. "Der Sandmann". *Nachtstücke*. Berlin, 1817.
- Koppelman, Susan. *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*. Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green U. Popular P, 1972.
- Kore-eda, Hirokazu. *Air Doll (Kūki ningyō)*. Asmik Ace Entertainment, 2009.
- Lease, Maria. *Dolly Dearest*. Trimark Pictures, 1991.
- Lee, Vernon. "The Doll.". 1896 ("The Image")For Maurice, *Five Unlikely Stories*. London, John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1927.
- Leonetti, John R., Directo)/ Gary Dauberman, Screenplay. *Annabelle*. Warner Bros., 2015.
- L'Isle-Adam, Villiers de. *L'Ève future*. Paris, M. de Brunhoff, 1886.
- López-Pellisa, Teresa. *Patologías de la realidad virtual*. México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015.
- Lubitsch, Ernst. *Die Puppe*. Weimar Republic, 1919.
- Mancini, Don. *Child's play [Chucky]*. Film Franchise comprising eight films, 1988-2019.
- Manrique, Mariel, editor. *Muñecas: el tiempo de la belleza y el terror*. Shangrila Ediciones, 2019.
- O'Brien, Susannah. *The Doll*. United States, 2017.
- Offenbach, Jacques /Barbier, Jules. 1881. *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. Opera. Based on the stories by E.T.A. Hoffmann "Der Sandmann", "Geschichte von verlorenen Spiegelbilde", and "Rat Krespel".
- Olea, Pedro, Director/ Garci, José Luis, Screenplay. *No es bueno que el hombre esté solo*. Spain, Lotus Film Internacional, 1973.
- Olsen, Tillie. *Silences*. New York, Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978.
- Parigi, Robert. *Love Object*. United States, Cntent Film, Lions Gate Home Entertainment, 2003.
- Pedraza, Pilar. "Pigmalión y las mujeres minerales." *Dossiers féministes*, no. 4 (2000), pp. 31-47.
- Pedraza, Pilar. *Máquinas de amar. Secretos del cuerpo artificial*. Madrid, Valdemar, 1998.
- Pérez Galdós, Benito. "La princesa y el granuja." *Revista Cantabro-Asturiana*, Vol. 1, Santander, 1877.
- Phillips, Julie. "The Secret Sci-Fi Life of Alice B. Sheldon." *extracted from James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon*. St. Martin's Press, LLC, 2006. *NPR.org*. 12 November 2006, [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6468136&t=1574263214297](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6468136&t=1574263214297), Accessed 4 Apr. 2017.
- Richards, Cliff. "Living Doll", written by Lionel Bart. *Serious Charge* (E.P.). EMI Records, 1959.
- Roas, David. *Tras los límites de lo real. Una definición de lo fantástico*. Madrid, Páginas de Espuma, 2011.
- . *Invasión*. Madrid, Páginas de Espuma, 2018.
- Rueda, Lluís. "Coletas Tracy." *VVAA. Horror Dummies. Marionetas, ventrílocuos, mecanismos psicóticos*. Barcelona, Hermenaute, 2017, pp. 57-72.
- Russ, Joanna. *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. Austin, U of Texas P, 1983.
- Sandberg, David F., Director/ Gary Dauberman, Screenplay. *Annabelle: Creation*. Warner Bros., 2017.
- Santos, Care. "Aria de la muñeca mecánica". *Steampunk: antología retrofuturista*, Félix J. Palma (ed.), Madrid, Ediciones Nevsky, 2012.
- Sarafian, Richard C., Director/Sohl, Jerry, Writer. "Living Doll". *The Twilight Zone*, season 5, episode 6, CBS All Access 1963.
- Sargent, Pamela. *Women of Wonder: Science Fiction Stories by Women about Women*. New York, Vintage Books, 1975.
- Simmons, Laurie. *Talking Objects*. 1987-1989. <http://www.lauriesimmons.net/>. Accessed 15 Dec. 2019.
- . *The Love Doll*. 2009. <http://www.lauriesimmons.net/>. Accessed 15 Dec. 2019..
- . *Kigurumi, Dolls, and How We See*, 2014. <http://www.lauriesimmons.net/>. Accessed 15 Dec. 2019..
- Tomeo, Javier. "La muñeca hinchable". *Cuentos completos*. Madrid, Páginas de Espuma, 2012, p. 477.
- Valera, Juan. "La muñequita" [1894]. *Obras*. Madrid, Aguilar, 1964, pp. 1022-24.
- Velázquez, Raquel "Quaerens quem devoret: El resurgimiento de la mujer mantis o mujer devoradora en el microrrelato fantástico español del siglo XXI". *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, vol. 96, no. 6, 2019, pp. 595-610.
- . "La reescritura de los mitos clásicos en el microrrelato español del siglo XXI". *Ecós y Resplandores Helenos en la Literatura Hispana. Siglos XVI-XXI*, edited by Alvarado Teodorika, Tatiana/Grigoriadou, Theodora /García Romero, Fernando, La Paz-Madrid, Sociedad Boliviana de Estudios Clásicos-Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos, 2018, pp. 333-59.
- Walter, Natash. *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*. London, Virago Press, 2010.
- Yu, Ronny, Director/Mancini, Don, Writer. *The Bride of Chucky*. United States, Universal Studios, 1998.
- Zapata, Miguel Ángel. *Revelaciones y magias*. Granada, Traspies, 2009.

**Author's profile:** Raquel Velázquez is Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Spanish Literature at The University of Barcelona. Her areas of research include literature and press during Franco dictatorship; pathographic narratives; biblical and mythological rewriting in narrative; the connections between literature and cinema; and a special attention in fantastic microfiction and female writing. The results of her research have been published, among others, in the journals *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, *ALEC*, *Rilce*, o *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*. She is a member of the Group of Research on Fantastic Studies (GEF), coordinated by David Roas. Email: <[raquel\\_velazquez@ub.edu](mailto:raquel_velazquez@ub.edu)>